A written word is the choicest of relics. It is something at once more intimate with us and more universal than any other work of art. It is the work of art nearest to life itself.

- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

I have selected and edited this collection of language-illustrated classics in trilogies—in groups of three related classic novels or other distinguished works—with separate implementation manuals, making four-book sets. Each implementation manual addresses a trilogy as a whole and contains discussion questions, suggestions for cumulative essay tests, and recommendations for formal academic papers as presented in my *Advanced Academic Writing* series. The trilogies are not age-graded or specifically linked to individual strands of my English curricula; you may determine readiness and use them where you would like to and where you know is best. My hope is that each trilogy will be used as a one-semester project, providing a minimum of six major readings per year, with emphasis on the word *minimum*.
In creating this collection, I have aimed to have as few purposes as possible.

One purpose is to provide a library of superb, world-recognized books that will strengthen students with stories, characters, sublime English, and rigorous vocabulary, while giving them personal acquaintance with the classic books most loved by good readers. Reading the classics is an essential part of a proper education. There are reasons—having nothing to do with school—why classics become classics; there are things in them worth keeping that books of the moment lack.

A second purpose is to demonstrate how profoundly formal language study benefits important reading; to accomplish this, I have developed a language-illustration format that incorporates and applies the methods of formal language study found in my texts on vocabulary, grammar, writing, and poetics. We have been in rehearsal long enough; now let us read.

The language illustrations are only that: illustrations. Many books have illustrations of pirates or dogs in the snow, and the books in this collection too have illustrations—of language itself. There are vocabulary definitions augmented with parts of speech and sometimes Latin or Greek stems; there are good looks at poetic writing; there are Socratic plot questions to think
about. When sentences have telling structures, I have used four-level analysis to dig the grammar out. These illustrations are meant to flow unobtrusively with the story, available as quick, elective glances for a reader’s enjoyment.

Might the reader pause from the story and spend a moment or two looking at the illustration of a detail of language? Surely, but that is the case with any illustration. I often have paused and glanced from the text to enjoy a painting, such as one of N.C. Wyeth’s paintings of pirates in *Treasure Island*, and then moved back to the text of the story. Here, too, one may look at an illustration of the author’s language and then return to the story.

The content of these illustrations is sometimes advanced and technical. That is as it should be. These books are a locus of confluence where the elements of my curricular programs converge. It is thrilling to see it happen, and to see what full-powered language arts can do. Those who have not studied the preparatory grammar, vocabulary, or poetry texts may be perplexed by some of the more rigorous illustrations; if so, the preparatory texts are available. This collection of literature is not the place to teach grammar or poetics; it is a place to enjoy them. Those who have studied my English curricula
deserve a program of literature that lets them run with the talent they have developed.

These illustrated classics have not been diminished to the blank stare of a textbook. They are still good stories. Happiness must be pursued. The language illustrations must be symbiotic and not break or block the reading adventure. What Coleridge called “the suspension of disbelief” is paramount. The illustrations are designed to complement the book in a reader’s way, making it needless to stop reading and look something up in a reference book. Likewise, discussions and papers that enhance the series are presented in separate manuals in a read-first, analyze-later process that respects the primacy and integrity of the reading experience.

Good books have a visual magic that real readers know. I have worked on the look of the page; each book is set in readable Goudy Old Style type, with roomy, open-spaced lines and indented paragraphs. There are few hyphenated lines, keeping words intact. There are wide margins and a wider center gutter. The page itself is hand-sized, just right for good reading. In a glittering digital age, here is a reminder of why we still do, and always will, love books.

Each title also contains good biographical background about its author and other historical and cultural facts
that benefit our thoughts.

What criteria have I used to choose the books for the collection? I know them. They are my friends. They have been loyal to me during the decades of my life. They are read everywhere, whether schools and colleges assign them or not. They have exciting vocabularies with words to learn, characters that blink and look back, and sentences that make my hair stand on end.

I am sometimes asked, would it not be better to use modernized versions of the classics, versions with current English? It is a chilling question. The assumption is that we should present students with language they already know—in other words, removing the words they do not already know—thus avoiding the very thing most worth seeking out: learning. The answer is no; it is this margin of growth that we value; it is the very thing that we want not to miss.

Finally, many classics include words, events, or values that might seem regrettable. Often, hard details are necessary to the hard truth of the art. When an offensive value—such as prejudice—appears, the novel is in part a kind of historical document, and I have made no attempt to censor any book. Education means knowing the truth.

Now, as it always has been, being educated is about what you have read.

Michael Clay Thompson
The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

The story about Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is one of literary history’s great stories of intuitive inspiration. *Dr. Jekyll* came to Robert Louis Stevenson in a dream that he had in 1885 as he slept at home in Bournemouth, on the southern coast of England. In the night, there were suddenly what Mrs. Stevenson termed “cries of horror from Louis.” When she awakened him to rescue him from his nightmare, he objected, saying that he had been enjoying a “fine bogey tale.” Within three days the first draft of the book was complete. One report holds that he then burned the manuscript and rewrote the story in less than a week. This accomplishment is more impressive for the fact that Stevenson was bedridden at the time.

It is sometimes said that *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is Stevenson’s foray into multiple personality disorder, but that seems off the mark to me. It diminishes the story. There is no need to reduce this story until it fits into a modern term. Stevenson was not illustrating a small, defined fact. He was diving into something deeper and less understood, something in the dreams that darken human nature.
G.K. Chesterton once said that the Edinburgh-born Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson “seemed to pick the right word up on the point of his pen.” Stevenson—whose novels were admired by Ernest Hemingway and J.M. Barrie—had a sickly constitution and was subject to coughs and fevers. His thin frame made it hard for him to fit in at school. Late in life, he moved to Samoa for the healthy air. By the age of forty-four, he was gone.

Stevenson wrote travel books, poetry, and essays, but his place in literary history is best guaranteed by *Treasure Island*, his transcendent, magical novel of pirates and boyhood adventure. Today, his works are among the most translated in the world.
“I incline to Cain’s heresy,” he used to say quaintly: “I let my brother go to the devil in his own way.” In this character, it was frequently his fortune to be the last reputable acquaintance and the last good influence in the lives of down-going men. And to such as these, so long as they came about his chambers, he never marked a shade of change in his demeanour.

Mr. Utterson...was a man of a rugged countenance, that was never lighted by a smile; cold, scanty and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment; lean, long, dusty, dreary, and yet somehow lovable. Page 13.

Writers must be wary of wordy adjectives. Mark Twain said, “When you catch an adjective, kill it,” but Stevenson was a master of the adjective. We remember his description from Treasure Island of the “black, broken nails, and the sabre cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white.”

demeanour: n. outward behavior
equipped with neither bell nor knocker, was blistered and distained. Tramps slouched into the recess and struck matches on the panels; children kept shop upon the steps; the schoolboy had tried his knife on the mouldings; and for close on a generation, no one had appeared to drive away these random visitors or to repair their ravages.

...no one had appeared to drive away these random visitors or to repair their ravages.

Prose writers use poetic techniques to give a richness to prose. Hidden in paragraphs, poetic techniques work unseen to shape emphasis and tone. Here waves of r’s break on the idea of ravages. Keep in mind that Stevenson was also a poet.

Mr. Enfield and the lawyer were on the other side of the by-street; but when they came abreast of the entry, the former lifted up his cane and pointed.

distained: adj. stained. Note that this is a different word from disdained.
abreast: adv. alongside, side by side
long time. Mr. Utterson had been some minutes at his post, when he was aware of an odd, light footstep drawing near. In the course of his nightly patrols, he had long grown accustomed to the quaint effect with

By ten o’clock, when the shops were closed, the by-street was very solitary and, in spite of the low growl of London from all round, very silent. Small sounds carried far; domestic sounds out of the houses were clearly audible on either side of the roadway....

The subdued gloom of the scene is orchestrated with a section of low vowels. There are more than I have marked, such as the vowel sounds in shops, small, and audible. Page 33.

which the footfalls of a single person, while he is still a great way off, suddenly spring out distinct from the vast hum and clatter of the city. Yet his attention had
Utterson.

“O, dear no, sir. He never dines here,” replied the butler. “Indeed we see very little of him on this side of the house; he mostly comes and goes by the laboratory.”

“Well, good-night, Poole.”

“Good-night, Mr. Utterson.” And the lawyer set out homeward with a very heavy heart. “Poor Harry Jekyll,” he thought, “my mind misgives me he is in deep waters! He was wild when he was young; a long while ago to be sure; but in the law of God, there is no statute of limitations. Ay, it must be that; the ghost of

...home ward / with a / ve ry / hea vy / heart.

The pensive heaviness of the moment is weighed with sad descending trochees. The final unstressed syllable expected after heart is dropped. The technique of dropping the unstressed syllable from a final trochee is called catalexis. Cata means down.

**my mind misgives:** We know these prescient, foreboding words from Act I, scene iv of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet.*
some old sin, the cancer of some concealed disgrace: punishment coming, pede claudio, years after memory has forgotten and self-love condoned the fault.” And the lawyer, scared by the thought, brooded a while on his own past, groping in all the corners of memory, lest by chance some Jack-in-the-Box of an old iniquity should leap to light there. His past was fairly blameless; few men could read the rolls of their life with less apprehension; yet he was humbled to the dust by the many ill things he had done, and raised up again into a sober and fearful gratitude by the many that he had come so near to doing, yet avoided. And then by a return on his former subject, he conceived a spark of hope. “This Master Hyde, if he were studied,” thought he, “must have secrets of his own; black secrets, by the look of him; secrets compared to which poor Jekyll’s worst would be like sunshine. Things cannot continue as they are. It turns me cold to think of this creature stealing like a thief to Harry’s bedside; poor Harry, what a wakening! And the danger of it; for if this Hyde suspects the existence of the will, he may grow impatient to inherit. Ay, I must put my shoulder to the wheel if Jekyll will but let me,” he added, “if Jekyll will

*pede claudio:* Latin phrase meaning “on limping or halting foot”
*apprehension:* n. anxiety
only let me.” For once more he saw before his mind’s eye, as clear as a transparency, the strange clauses of the will.

It turns me cold to think of this creature stealing like a thief...

As you continue to listen to the sounds of writing, you become increasingly aware of them. You learn to hear. Many writers write poetry in addition to prose, and they do both for a living, and they are extraordinarily attuned to all of the audible elements of language, from vowels, to consonants, to silences. Gradually, reading becomes a different experience, something greater and more meaningful than we had suspected, before we knew that great writers shape sound to support meaning. Look at how the hideous e’s above contrast with and emphasize the adjective cold. Page 43.
surprised and a trifle hurt; and at that Mr. Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway. At the horror of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted.

It was two o’clock when she came to herself and called for the police. The murderer was gone long ago; but there lay his victim in the middle of the lane, incredibly mangled. The stick with which the deed had been done, although it was of some rare and very common structure for alliteration is the alliterated compound.

sights and sounds: One common structure for alliteration is the alliterated compound.